



News Release

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Clean up after your pooch!

OLYMPIA – When Daisy and Digger go on their daily doggie walks, they create a surprising amount of bacteria-filled waste. According to the state Department of Ecology, pet waste can cause serious environmental harm unless properly controlled.

“In a watershed of 100,000 people, dogs generate about 2 ½ tons of feces per day,” said Ralph Svrjcek, an Ecology water cleanup specialist. “That’s almost two million tons a year.”

Studies show about half of all dog owners walk their dogs in public places, and up to 40 percent of these don’t pick up after their pets.

Fecal matter that gets into water contributes to all sorts of problems – from sick kids, to mucky algae that suffocates fish, to shellfish closures. “It seems like such a small amount, but it really does add up,” Svrjcek said. “Many people don’t realize how important it is to take care of their pet waste so it stays out of our lakes, rivers and streams.”

Pollutants from pet waste can be washed into storm sewers, most of which drain directly into natural water bodies. Once in water, the fecal matter acts just like any other manure ... it becomes fertilizer that encourages the growth of algae. This algae uses up oxygen in the water and makes it tough for fish to breathe.

Pet waste also contains bacteria and parasites that can make water unsafe for swimming or drinking. Pets, children who play outside and adults who garden are most likely to be exposed. Flies also spread disease from animal waste. And when waste gets into shellfish beds, it can make the shellfish unsafe to eat.

So what should you do? “Don’t just throw your dog’s business over the fence,” Svrjcek warned. “Yes, it will biodegrade eventually, but meanwhile it can cause major problems for the rest of us.”

Cleaning up after your pet can be as simple as taking along a plastic bag or pooper scooper on your next walk. Then, ideally, you should flush the results down the toilet where any bacteria and parasites can be caught by your septic system or sewage treatment plant.

Next best is burying it in the yard, about five inches deep, away from vegetable gardens, lakes, streams ditches or wells.

You may also put it in the trash. However, disposing of pet waste with household garbage is against the law in some communities, and even if it is legal, experts say it's still not the best solution because such waste can cause pollution problems in landfills and incinerators.

If you leave your pet's waste to decay in your yard, be sure it doesn't become a problem. Clean up near wells, storm drains, ditches, and waterways. And always remove waste from areas where children play.

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Ecology's Web site: <http://www.ecy.wa.gov>

Broadcast version

When Daisy and Digger go on their daily doggie walks, they generate a surprising amount of bacteria-filled waste, adding up to as much as sixty tons per day in our state. The Department of Ecology wants to remind you that this waste can contaminate Washington's waters and make people and animals sick.

Remember to take along a plastic bag or pooper scooper on your next walk. It's best to flush your pet's waste down the toilet or bury it five inches deep in the backyard, away from lakes, streams or vegetable gardens.

If you leave it in your yard, clean up near wells, storm drains, ditches, and waterways. And always remove animal waste from areas where children play.